

Congressmen Jesse L. Jackson, Jr., today released the following statement after passage of The School Readiness Act of 2003 (H.R. 2210), which calls for significant restructuring of Head Start:

"The School Readiness Act just proves that the Republican leadership has never heard the old saying 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it.' Head Start has successfully served millions of low-income children, their families, and the nation for almost 40 years. 'Leave no child behind' was obviously just rhetoric. This bill leaves MORE children behind. Instead of funding Head Start so it can do more for the almost one million children it serves, and tens of thousands of others who could use Head Start, the bill cripples the program.

"The School Readiness Act takes the heart and soul out of Head Start, and flies in the face of decades of research on early childhood education. The bill removes high national educational standards for Head Start. Meanwhile, it brushes aside the importance of comprehensive services that have a positive impact on learning for low-income children, such as nutrition and health care. Supporting this measure also supports allowing faith-based organizations that run Head Start programs to hire and fire teachers based on their religious beliefs, and supports turning direct local funding into block-grants that go to the states. The block-grant maneuver is said to encourage more coordination between Head Start and state agencies. Too bad those who designed this scheme did not know that such collaboration is already an integral part of Head Start.

"This bill is just another cynical attempt by the Bush Administration and Republican-led Congress to destroy the federal government from the inside, especially programs that target those who are most in need. At every turn they send more power to the states, even in situations like this when the federal program is sound. It is long past time to stop slinging slogans and playing politics with children's lives. It is time for bold public policy that TRULY leaves no child behind."